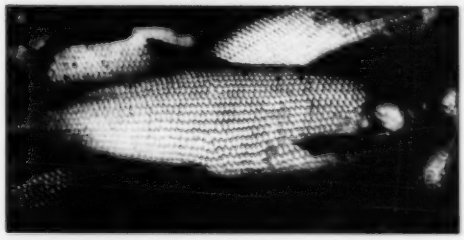
Saskatchewan
Parks and
Renewable
Resources

Hon. Lorne Kopelchuk
Minister

Overview

Proposed Goals, Policies and Strategies for Fisheries Management in Saskatchewan in the 1990's



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Introduction

This document is one of a continuing series of discussion papers which examine the issues confronting the availability and use of fish resources in Saskatchewan and which seek public input in the development of appropriate management goals and strategies to meet these issues. Readers wishing more detail on these matters are referred to the longer document on which this overview is based. This document has the same title and is available at departmental offices.

Almost a decade has passed since the Action Plan for the 1980s was prepared and it is time for an evaluation. The situation with respect to the fisheries, and the fish resources on which they depend, is critical. The current and projected utilization of species in demand, such as walleye, lake trout and pike, cannot be supported by the available supply everywhere. Demand is excessive, and although some successes have been achieved in increasing supply, the amount of fish that can be produced by, and harvested from, aquatic ecosystems is finite and limited. The strategic plan for the 1990s describes a new, comprehensive and fundamentally different approach which will make harvests commensurate with sustainable supplies.

Issues

Three complex issues must be resolved:

Conflict Among the Stakeholders

The principal conflicts are between commercial and recreational fishermen, and between traditional resource users and other fishermen. They are aggravated because of differing values, claims and rights as well as the unequal distribution of people and fish resources in Saskatchewan and are caused by:

- flawed allocation of harvests among the different user groups because everyone has virtually free access to the resources;
- stakeholders with differing sets of values utilizing the same resources and disagreeing on how harvests should be shared;
- inadequate opportunities for meaningful public involvement at all stages of the fisheries management process;
- insufficient knowledge about the resources and those who use them which prevents timely management action;
- poor public knowledge about the resources and their constraints which has led to excessive demands and conflicts;
- management decisions have not always been consistent which has caused conflicts about resource sharing; and,
- current legislative mechanisms which are time-consuming and involved.

Loss of Fish and Fish Habitat

Demand for fish in Saskatchewan is greater than supply. Free access to fish resources which allows citizens to harvest fish does not protect fish from overexploitation, nor does it protect their habitats from destruction. Resources provided freely are generally believed to have little value and are used to excess.

Fish populations are lost because of:

- overharvesting as a result of increased numbers of fishermen operating legally;
- illegal practices such as overlimits and illegal gear;
- destruction of fish habitat;
- contaminants in fish raise health concerns, inhibit their use and reduce revenues;
- insufficient data on the amounts of fish habitat available, amounts of fish allocated, amounts harvested and on status of populations being harvested; and
- fisheries management and enforcement activities have not always been effective and timely.

Poor Economic Performance of the Fisheries

Those who use the resources commercially have low and erratic incomes. Security of tenure at lakes where they or their clients fish is of increasing concern.

Poor economic performance is caused by:

- ☐ flawed allocation of harvests among and within the different user groups;
- ☐ virtually free access to fish resources has attracted excessive numbers of commercial net fishermen and lodge operators; and,
- ☐ the true economic value of the fish resources is unknown and not well understood.

■ Goals

The goal is to sustain wild fish populations and use them to contribute to the social and economic welfare of Saskatchewan citizens. The goal has three components:

1. maintain sustainable supplies of fish, enhance these whenever possible, and maintain and restore their habitats;
2. reconcile conflicting social, cultural, recreational and economic values of fish harvests on an individual lake basis; and,
3. provide opportunities for improving the economic performance of the fisheries.

■ Policies

Policies are responses to issues and indicate actions to be taken. Three principal policies are required to deal with the fisheries issues.

Conserve and Restore the Fish Resources

Fish are finite, renewable, valuable and limited in abundance. The primary reasons for the loss of fish are overharvesting and habitat loss. Fish populations must be conserved, protected, and when advantageous, enhanced. This means the amount of harvesting must be carefully regulated and controlled. Habitats must also be protected and improved where necessary.

Involve Stakeholders in Fisheries Management and Allocation

Allocations that do not reflect stakeholder values are a major source of conflict among fishermen. Conflicts can be resolved through a new co-operative process which will offer fishermen an active role in management and allocation decisions. It will also provide a forum for resolving their differences. Involving stakeholders in fisheries management activities is known as co-management.

By involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, the policy attempts to provide support and opportunities to people as well as improve the skills they need in managing renewable resources.

By involving stakeholders in the decision-making process, a mechanism is created to reconcile the differing values and uses of fish and, at the same time, allocate harvests to those who can use them in the most beneficial ways. This is known as determining best use.

Stakeholders should determine best use by consensus on a lake by lake basis because what is best for one lake may not be best for another. Criteria must be developed that are socially, culturally, recreationally and economically acceptable to meet the needs of each sitation.

Improve Economic Performance of the Fisheries

Rationalizing the size of the commercial net and outfitting fisheries to the resources available should improve their economic returns.

Fisheries Management Principles

Retain Provincial Responsibilities for Fisheries Conservation

Government is prepared to devolve responsibilities for determining best use and allocation of harvests to stakeholders but will retain control over the conservation, administration and legal components to ensure a supply of fish for future generations.

Maintain Healthy Ecosystems and Species Diversity

Aquatic ecosystems are barometers of the health of the environment. Healthy systems have a diversity of fish species which produce a range of benefits including harvests of fish, recreation and economic activity. Human actions can diminish these, and efforts must be directed to maintain and protect fish communities and their habitats to ensure these benefits continue to be available.

Manage Fish Populations on a Sustainable Basis

Fish are the basis for the fisheries and must be conserved and protected. The supply of fish and aquatic resources in Saskatchewan is finite and cannot be significantly increased. Renewable resources must be harvested on the basis of their ability to sustain themselves, not on the basis of demand for them.

Maintain Diversity of Opportunity

Greater social and economic benefits are likely to accrue to Saskatchewan citizens if a variety of fisheries are maintained.

Maintain Public Access to Fish Resources

Traditionally the public have enjoyed access to fish resources as well as to parks, wildlife, timber and resource lands. Terms of access have changed over the years, and will continue to change as demands for finite resources increase. However the access principle itself will be maintained.

Provide Fish to Treaty Indians as Required By The Resources Transfer Agreement, 1930

These rights, which were included in an agreement between Canada and Saskatchewan, will continue to be recognized and appropriate allocations made.

Acquire Data on the Status of Fish Resources and the Fisheries

Sound fisheries management requires information about fish populations being harvested, those who use them, and the economic and social aspects of the fisheries. Funding limitations will place more obligations on stakeholders to provide data on their use of fish to support effective management.

Strategies and Tactics

Three principal strategies are proposed for the 1990s: conservation; co-management; and rationalization. Each strategy consists of several tactics.

Conserve, Enhance and Rehabilitate Fish Populations and Restore Their Habitats

Proposed tactics include:

1. Regulate harvests to conserve stocks of fish by:
   a) establishing total allowable catches (TACs) for each lake and species;
   b) controlling fishing by regulating catches and limiting effort, by imposing closed areas and seasons, and by restricting the type and amount of gear that may be used and size of fish that may be caught; and,
   c) restricting entry to selected fisheries by controlling the numbers of licences that may be sold.
2. Protect fish and their habitats and restore those which have been degraded by man's activities.
3. Enhance fish populations to supplement natural reproduction where possible.
4. Rehabilitate fish populations to compensate for the inadequacies of regulation and protection where possible.
5. Acquire sufficient data about fish, fishing, habitats and fishermen to support management activities.
6. Enforce fisheries regulations firmly and effectively to ensure fish and their habitats are conserved and protected.

Implement Co-management with the Stakeholders and Allocate Harvests Optimally

1. Devolve responsibility for allocating fish harvests to local stakeholders but retain responsibility for determining the amount of resource available at each lake within the Department.
2. Foster co-management by encouraging stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process to determine the best uses for fish harvests on a lake by lake basis.

3. Involve stakeholders in the co-management process by:

   a) encouraging them to develop committees responsible for determining the best use of fish resources at each lake and for allocating harvests;

   b) encouraging them to assist in the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; and,

   c) providing them with data and information about each lake and fishery, as well as about the values and benefits of healthy aquatic ecosystems.

4. Develop opportunities to work co-operatively with non-governmental organizations.

5. Establish a mobile management team to assist regional managers and stakeholders in the implementation of local lake management and allocation committees.

6. Develop and encourage public education and involvement programs based on ecosystem approach to managing fisheries on a sustainable basis.

Rationalize the Fisheries

1. Establish quotas for each lake and species which ensure sufficient fish are allocated to maintain the resource.

2. Establish quotas for each lake, fishery and species on the basis of current harvests.

3. Consult stakeholders and where they desire:

   a) establish property rights for the commercial users of the resource with individual transferable marketable quotas based on previous participation in the commercial net and outfitting fisheries;

   b) facilitate the transfer of these rights by sale or rent among the stakeholders;

   c) allow the Department to hold the quotas for the subsistence and recreational fisheries and augment them by purchasing more from the commercial users of the resource or relinquish them by selling them to the commercial users of the resource;

   d) restrict the number of licences for each lake and fishery on the basis of quota availability as required for conservation; and,

   e) implement special licences for selected zones, purposes, lakes, species, etc., for purposes of conservation.

4. Obtain a fair return for the use of the fish resources and cover the costs of management and administration.

■ Implementation

The proposed plan is centered around three principal strategies: conservation, co-management and rationalization. The conservation strategy and many of its tactics are in place and functioning.

Co-management and rationalization are new. The need for them does not exist at all lakes in Saskatchewan and, as a result, these processes need not be implemented everywhere at once. Instead, implementation would occur on a lake by lake basis and will begin either as a result of consultations with, or requests from, stakeholders.

Initially, co-management and rationalization should be attempted experimentally at lakes where there are few stakeholders and simple situations. These small projects will provide opportunities for everyone concerned to develop and refine the necessary skills and techniques and to make these processes work. Larger and more complex situations would be attempted incrementally over time. It is expected that these activities will proceed rapidly as familiarization with, and demand for, them grows.

Fisheries management plans, which reflect the broad needs, opportunities, and priorities to be addressed, as well as constraints presented by local geography, hydrology and population distribution, will be developed for each region in consultation with stakeholders. The ultimate goal is to develop individual lake and stream management plans with the help of interested stakeholders. These will be implemented through co-management wherever possible and desirable.

Program Actions

The strategic plan will be implemented through the existing program delivery system of Saskatchewan Parks and Renewable Resources (SPRR). This system comprises eight regions: La Ronge, Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, Hudson Bay, Saskatoon, Swift Current, Regina and Melville. Issues will be identified in each region, alternative courses of action proposed and evaluated, management plans prepared, and appropriate actions taken through locally-based processes of consultation and co-management.

Some actions are described as examples of activities which have been done, and which may continue to be done in future. They are presented on the basis of fisheries management zones because problems and issues within a zone tend to be similar.

Southern Management Zone. This area includes the Swift Current, Saskatoon, Regina and Melville Regions, as well as the southern portions of the Meadow Lake, Prince Albert and Hudson Bay Regions. Most of the people in Saskatchewan live in this area and most of the fishing occurs here. Waterbodies in this zone are influenced by the amount of snow and rain they receive. Their numbers are limited and many are affected by man's activities.

The small number of waterbodies dictates that program actions be directed to existing streams and reservoirs. Habitat protection and rehabilitation, intensive management and enhancement are important activities.

Habitat protection and rehabilitation. This is a major concern in the Southern Zone because of the limited number of waters and the impact of man's activities on them. Dams, reservoirs, irrigation, and lake and stream shoreline alterations have positive and negative impacts on fish habitat. All habitat must be protected, and degraded habitat must be restored.

Stream enhancement. This is a relatively new initiative of the Fish Enhancement Program and will continue as a priority activity in the 1990s. Stream enhancement projects make use of local features and provide angling opportunities with low construction and maintenance costs. Co-operative projects are popular with local users, and several have won conservation awards.

Intensive Fisheries Management. Stocking reservoirs provides angling opportunities at reasonable cost. Reservoirs are used for multiple purposes, and stocking fish for angling is compatible with most of these. SPRR co-operates with municipalities and wildlife groups in the development of these projects.

The Southern Zone is also an area in which opportunities exist for the development of urban or "doorstep" angling, and for improvement of access for physically handicapped people, senior citizens and children.

Central Management Zone. This area includes the Meadow Lake, Prince Albert, Hudson Bay and La Ronge Regions. It is a transition between the prairie Southern and forested Northern Zones. It has more waterbodies than the Southern Zone but fewer than the Northern. Most are natural and occur in attractive settings. Although few people live here, the lakes support subsistence, recreational, outfitting and commercial net fishing and provide about half the total provincial harvest of fish.

Because of the number and variety of users, large harvests and finite supply, the principal program actions will be to rationalize the fisheries and manage them on the basis of sustainability. A range of other program actions will be implemented, as required, based on local problems and priorities.

Conservation. A variety of conservation measures will be implemented at individual lakes or groups of lakes. Because of the number and size of lakes in this zone, they must be managed on the basis of sustainability. Some require enhancement but this must be done selectively because the existing hatchery cannot service all needs in this zone.

Harvest quotas. Quotas must be established for each lake, fishery and species on the basis of current harvests and total allowable catches.

Catch and release angling. This program will educate users and highlight conservation, and at the same time increase the diversity of available angling opportunities by preserving selected fish stocks in a lightly exploited state.

Special angling limits and area closures. These measures will be taken to mitigate the overharvest or potential overharvest of game fish.

Separate species quotas for the commercial net fishery. These quotas have been implemented for all heavily fished waters, and will be applied whenever new quotas are established. Species management will remain a cornerstone of this fishery.

Rationalization. A new approach to allocation which involves determining the best use of the resource through co-management is central to the strategy for the 1990s.

Lake management committees. Fisheries management and allocation decision making by committees representing all stakeholders at a lake will be a major initiative in the Central Zone for the 1990s. This is an expansion and formalization of an existing initiative. Delegation of responsibility for allocating harvests among eligible stakeholders will be a feature of this program.

Lake management agreements. These agreements will provide for reciprocal actions between SPRR and users to facilitate mutual management interests on a waterbody. These will be pursued with outfitters, commercial net fishermen, anglers and subsistence fishermen.

Individual transferable quotas (ITQs). ITQs will enable stakeholders to shift to an agreed best use of the fisheries at lakes through economic means. Commercial users will be able to better chart their own futures, and make decisions regarding the size and types of operation while ensuring the resources are harvested at sustainable levels. This is known as "sustainable development".

Fish enhancement. A wide variety of projects under the Fish Enhancement Program will be implemented in the Central Zone. Lake aeration, lake and stream habitat improvement and trout pond development are some popular projects which will continue to provide new and diversified angling opportunities in the 1990s.

Habitat improvement. Actions will be taken to protect and enhance existing habitat to preserve naturally reproducing fish populations.

Northern Management Zone. This zone includes the Meadow Lake and La Ronge Regions. More than 70% of the lakes in the province occur here. The principal fisheries are commercial, subsistence and outfitting, and they are managed on the basis of sustainability. As in the Central Management Zone, because of the number and variety of users, large harvests and finite supply, the principal program actions will be to sustain the resource and rationalize the fisheries.

Conservation. The conservation program actions to be implemented in the Northern Managment Zone are similar to those proposed for the Central Zone. The number and size of lakes, and their remoteness, makes it imperative that the fisheries be managed for sustainability. Maintenance of fishing quality is also important, hence trophy fish protection and catch and release programs will receive increased attention.

Harvest quotas, catch and release angling, special angling limits and area enclosures, and ***separate species quotas for the commercial net fishery***. These program actions are similar to those described for the Central Zone.

High quality angling. The High Quality Angling program, which applies reduced limits to specific waterbodies to maintain existing angling quality, has been well received by outfitters, and will be expanded in this zone in the 1990s.

Rationalization. Rationalization and allocation of harvests through co-management with stakeholders will be important program actions in this zone.

Lake management committees, lake management agreements, and ***individual transferable quotas (ITQs)***. These program actions are similar to those described for the Central Zone.

Fish enhancement and **habitat protection and improvement.** Actions will be taken to protect and enhance, where feasible, existing habitat to preserve naturally reproducing fish populations. Some fish enhancement activities will also be undertaken to bolster fish populations in small waterbodies. Maintenance of fish populations in large waterbodies is impractical in terms of the cost and numbers of fish required. Moreover these populations are managed better on the basis of sustainability.

Entire Province. In addition to the above programs which apply to specific areas, programs will be developed which provide a variety of ***educational opportunities*** for Saskatchewan residents of all ages. School curriculum material and general informational material and workshops will be used to increase public awareness of fish habitat and aquatic ecosystems, the importance of sustainable development in fisheries management, and the opportunities and benefits of consultation and co-management.

Increased attention will be given to other species, such as burbot, through programs such as, "Don't Waste the Taste", to both sustain and develop fisheries based upon them.

The single most important feature of the plan for the 1990s is the need for the increased involvement of stakeholders in the fisheries management decision-making process. Government simply cannot address all the problems and resolve all the issues confronting the fisheries and, as a result, it must rely on stakeholders for assistance. The term co-management reflects the co-operative nature of the process wherein each group of stakeholders must contribute something of value to the process in order to benefit from it. Thus it is truly a two-way street in which government and stakeholders participate equally for the sustainable development of Saskatchewan's fisheries.

Conclusion

The foregoing highlights some proposals for consideration. Readers are asked to propose other ideas and suggestions for consideration. Solutions must be found to prevent valuable resources from being lost. Social, cultural, recreational and economic components of the fisheries must be incorporated into the solutions.

The proposed plan represents a framework for a new thrust for fisheries management for the province. It is intended to serve as a catalyst to bring stakeholders and resource managers together to discuss all aspects of managing Saskatchewan's fisheries in the 1990s.

Recycled Paper

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